

Some questions for consideration by . . .

MODERN IDOL WORSHIPERS

VOLLIE TRIPP

IDOL WORSHIP is frowned upon as a general practice in this sophisticated age. You would have to conduct a lengthy survey to find even one of our "progressive" citizens worshipping a graven image. However, the worship of certain ideas and concepts, without benefit of iconic figures, is widespread and provokes no censure.

Such an idol is the idea of "progress" or whatever at the moment passes for progress. To be labeled "unprogressive" in one's political, social, or economic views is even more fatal to popularity than advanced halitosis, B.O., or a propensity to cannibalism. To be "agin" progress, or even neutral in the matter, marks one as a dangerous reactionary, out of sympathy with the aspirations of the common man.

Mr. Tripp, retired from the building business, now devotes full time to travel, writing, and promotion of free enterprise.

Now, our dictionary defines *progress* as "improvement, steady advancement toward perfection, moving toward a higher state." Nothing wrong with that. So the trouble must be one of definition, what the word means for different people. Just what *is* progress, anyway?

Among the so-called common people, and many well above the common level of intelligence, there exists a pathetic belief that progress is synonymous with the march of time; that by some strange arcane law, life is bound to improve as the years pass.

If we take the long, long view, encompassing tens of thousands of years, some such law or principle may operate in human affairs. I like to think that there is such a law, even though it is difficult to prove. But the widespread belief that progress is automatic, synchronized with the mere pas-

sage of time, is mischievous and dangerous. It gives rise to unreasoning worship of the new, the novel, the contemporary, and rules out all sound objective appraisal of the merits and real value of modern trends, fads, and fashions.

"Progress," the sacred cow of the masses, the graven image of those unable or unwilling to think soundly, has come to mean an urge for constant change and innovation for its own sake, with little concern for betterment, improvement, and a "gradual movement toward perfection." With millions clinging to this childish belief, is there much wonder that the world has experienced many violent swings of the pendulum during much of its long history?

There has undoubtedly been some net progress in the past 3,000 years. Medicine and science have lengthened, nearly doubled, the life span. Hunger and privation have been banished over large areas of the earth. Brutalizing toil has likewise disappeared from many sections. But it is important to remember, too, that within this short span many great cultures have taken sickening plunges into intellectual and spiritual darkness. Some disappeared, never to rise. Others are slowly clawing their way out and upward, inch by tortured inch.

In this essay, I am trying to

smash an idol, a persistent pernicious faith in the excellence of everything novel, or that looks novel—which implies that old ways are therefore bad, merely because they are old. The all but universal acceptance of this concept here in our own country has made many abominable things tolerable, or even fashionable, while many of our tested and proved ideals are now suspect. Warning signals are ignored as "progress" takes us on its dizzy spin through time and space.

Newness Is Not All Progress

As we read the tragic story of great nations for the past 1,500 years, it must be apparent that not all chronological movement was truly progressive, in a sense of improvement or net benefit to the people. The great Saracen civilization gave way to barbarism. Culture and learning in Europe had its ups and downs. Genghis Khan's thirteenth century despotism was no improvement over the tyrannies of the ancient world. Does this look like progress? Yes, if we accept the puerile doctrine that the new must be better than the old; that the old must ever give way to the new and modern, even if it violates our tenderest concepts, and all common sense.

Was the Spanish conquest of